SchoolMoney WisePay VenturEd Solutions™

EBOOK

Going cashless in education

A guide for schools and MATs looking to go cashless in school, or get more from their cashless payment systems







Introduction

Cashless payments are slowly but surely becoming the main way we pay for goods and services, both online and through contactless debit and credit cards at a point of sale.

The primary reason for this change is obvious – for many of us, it's incredibly convenient. Parents around the country can buy groceries online and have them appear at their door and complete their Christmas shopping without leaving their couch. Many of those same parents, however, are still writing a cheque, handing over cash to their children or making regular visits to the school office to pay for school needs such as trips, sports coaching, events and of course, lunches.

It seems almost archaic that there are still students carrying a pocketful of coins to school to buy their lunch without the parents having any idea what happened to the money or what food was consumed. The money that goes along to school with a child could just as easily be ending up in the hands of an older child or in the till of the local convenience shop.

Although cash payments are a great solution to these issues, there is also the incredibly important consideration of social inclusiveness in 'going cashless'.

While we know that more and more parents would love to pay for school-related things online, there are still a percentage who may not have the means or ability to do so. Every school is different, and every parental group is different. It is important to make sure that your cashless solutions work for everybody – and there are many ways to do it.

This guide not only covers the cost and convenience of a cashless school, it aims to lay out many of the wider benefits of cashless payment systems from lunch money to trips, all the way through to ways a school can save time and money, and help generate a new revenue stream by utilising underused school facilities.

With just 12% of all payments in the UK made with cash in 2024 (down from 23% in 2019), online payment methods have become much more widely accepted.

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The benefits and new possibilities of going cashless

For many schools, the work involved with collecting, reconciling, reporting and banking cash is already a huge burden. Cash and cheques come in from all directions for school meals, events, coaching, charity drives, uniforms and school fees and the administration time required to keep track of it all can be incredibly difficult. And that's before the added work of reporting to senior management and accountants is considered, especially when cheques may not have cleared or cash payments may not have been fully reconciled.

Going cashless can simplify all of your school's basic payments, such as school meals, school trips, clubs, uniforms and events in a way that saves both parental and staff time, with clear reporting for senior management.

However, going cashless can allow you to do so much more – modern payment systems can open up new revenue streams, including booking systems for school facilities and nurseries, management for the external booking of school facilities, cashless donations for both school fundraisers and charity drives.

Cashless payments (alongside the nationwide PayPoint service) also give you the opportunity to boost social inclusion by removing any stigma around free school meals and reducing the risk of cash being lost or spent elsewhere.

The benefits and potential uses of a cashless system for schools include:

- Convenience for parents – they will no longer have to queue at school or send money along with their child
- Completely cashless catering with attached menus for parents and all dietary requirements and allergies available for staff
- The simple collection of money for trips, clubs, uniforms and school fees
- Less stigma around free school meals, meaning potentially disadvantaged students always have something to eat
- A reduction in students losing cash, misspending it or having it taken from them by bullies
- Quick, reliable financial reporting (which is especially beneficial for MATs)
- The ability to run cashless charity drives and PTA events, even if multiple bank accounts are used
- Facilities for external sports coaches to take payments directly from parents
- The ability to make extra money by renting out school facilities such as parking, gyms, theatres and sports fields

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Cashless catering

Cashless catering is the most obvious starting point in developing a cashless school. Schools have long recognised the challenges of having large groups of students all lining up at once and then paying with cash or a voucher during the lunchtime rush.

A number of schools have already started centralising their cash payments somewhat to try and mitigate these issues by collecting money for meals at the main office or outside the dining hall, but although doing this speeds up the food serving process, the other issues around cash handling and management remain.

Moving school meals to an easy to use cashless system where money goes straight into the school bank account with full and instantaneous reports is an excellent way for a school to begin their cashless journey. It's an easy, regular payment that parents are used to and will help get them used to the concept before it is rolled out in other areas.

Another benefit of cashless catering is that it goes beyond just the collection of money. Allergy information and dietary requirements can be easily input and tracked by the parents through a cashless payments system ensuring that their children always get a nutritious meal that fits fully with their dietary requirements. This also takes a level of pressure off the school catering staff, many of whom rely on 'local knowledge' to remember which children can eat what.







Cashless systems for inclusion

The rise of an increasingly cashless society hasn't been without challenges – particularly for people in more difficult financial situations.

According to the Financial Inclusion Commission as of 2024, about 900,000 adults in the UK do not have a bank account. Although this has improved in recent years, that still represents a significant number of parents with no access to any kind of digital payments.

When working towards cashless operations as a school, it is important that these concerns are understood and fully considered. Including 98% of parents is not a genuinely inclusive approach.

Fortunately, there are ways to at least help mitigate these issues within a cashless payment environment. PayPoint, a system integrated with many major cashless school systems in the UK (including WisePay and SchoolMoney), is available in around 28,000 locations and lets parents who still use cash (out of preference or necessity) make school payments at a their local shops.

Alongside the challenges faced by parents, some children can feel 'socially segregated' by the current system of free school meals where it can be obvious to their peers that they are different. A recent inquiry into school poverty by a Scottish Parliamentary committee found that too many children are choosing to go hungry rather than claim free school meals because they are made to feel inferior by the current system.

Social inclusion is incredibly important to a child's ongoing wellbeing and development. Children just want to be children without feeling ostracised or different for things beyond their control.

In parts of the country, there is also a sense of 'rural pride' in many instances that can prevent parents from claiming free school meals, according to research from Bangor University. The report found that this can be mitigated somewhat by providing a non-public method for students to claim them.

Having meals paid for digitally means that everybody is treated the same at lunchtime, with no need for separate queuing or a voucher system to make certain children stand out.

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Stronger payment security

Cashless payments can potentially save your school a lot of time and money in administration (as well as being more convenient for the vast majority of parents), but there are also security advantages that may be less obvious.



Safeguarding for pupils

In a cashless school, students can't lose their money or have it stolen. Integrating cashless payments with school menus also means dietary requirements are always taken care of safely.



Avoid cash mishandling

Cash can be easily lost or stolen, either during the collection process or on the way to the bank. A fully cashless school always knows what money has come in, when, and what it's for.



Easy payment tracking

Cashless payment reports are automatically up-to-date because there are no cheques to clear (or bounce), nor the delays often associated with waiting for bank transfer to go through.



Lower insurance costs

Going cashless means there is never money left on the school premises. In addition to the obvious reduced risk of theft, this could also have a positive impact on your insurance premiums.

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Generating extra school income

The fact that schools are facing increasing budgetary pressures is not new. An effective cashless payments strategy can save both time and money in administration, but it can also provide your school with opportunities to make money, often in a relatively passive manner.

School facilities can be a fantastic local resource for the wider community – and an integrated cashless payment system is a great way to do it. Many school halls, school fields, parking areas and playgrounds lie dormant throughout the weekend and school holidays, while community groups, sports clubs, religious organisations and adult learning classes are often short of cost-effective space.

A school is the perfect location to be a focal point in the community where these groups can gather and hold classes, training sessions, fundraisers and more.

If your school has its own shop for uniforms and other branded items (or would like to), integrating it with your cashless payment service makes receiving payments and tracking stock a breeze. You could even consider offering a market for second hand uniforms, helping your parents save money whilst encouraging recycling.

Renting out facilities is also a fantastic way to make a positive difference to your community.

School fundraising ideas

From Red Nose Day to Children in Need, Christmas card selling, or school fêtes, schools might have several fundraisers across the year, sometimes for school trips or equipment, and other times for charity.

A good cashless payment system should let you use multiple bank accounts, meaning your Parent School Association can organise fundraisers separately from the main school accounts, but still within the payment system parents are familiar with.

With an integrated fundraising system, you can always have a passive link on your website, newsletters and social media so people can choose to donate if they wish at a time.

Tips for getting started

Every school is unique, so naturally there is no one size fits all approach to instituting a cashless payments system. Naturally though - you'll need both SLT and parental buy in, and you will need to make sure that your system is entirely fit for purpose and considers the needs of parents, students and any third parties, such as catering companies you are working with.

Here are 9 steps to take (and questions to ask):



Produce a simple cost-benefit analysis. How much time (and money) is currently being spent from the time taken by parents handing over cash, through to that cash being properly reconciled and delivered to the bank? And how much time would it take you if it was all done online?

List everything the school collects payments for. From trips to uniforms, from lunches to fundraisers and community events, there are likely to be many channels where cash is changing hands. Ensuring your new system covers all of these requirements will ease the translation.

Consult with parents and staff. There may be resistance from staff members who have "always done it this way". If a large part of a staff member's job is cash handling or collecting payments, they will have some obvious reluctance. Even with parents who support going cashless, change and change management is often an obstacle to overcome.

Create a clear communication plan to ensure the change is implemented smoothly. There is a good chance that most parents will be on board with the idea of paying for things online – but how will you effectively communicate with those who aren't.

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Set realistic goals and targets. Depending on the response from parents and staff, you may wish to stagger the introduction of cashless payments or have a clear transition period.

6

Consider the best pricing structure for your school. Different cashless solutions charge in different ways – some charge a flat fee with unlimited usage (which is great for budget assurance) while others charge on a per transaction basis (which can be accounted for in pricing).

7

Ensure your systems all integrate seamlessly. Your cashless payments platform should link both with your school's MIS (via software like Xporter) and with any cashless tills you are planning to use.

8

Consider integrating parental communication with the payment system. This allows your school to easily send requests for payments directly to a parent's email or mobile phone. For example, SchoolMoney integrates directly with Teachers2Parents and both feed notifications through to parents via the Eduspot app.

9

Seek feedback after launch! No system rollout is ever perfect, but most early teething problems can be easy to fix. Listen to teachers and parents, and take what they say on board.

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Cashless payment software

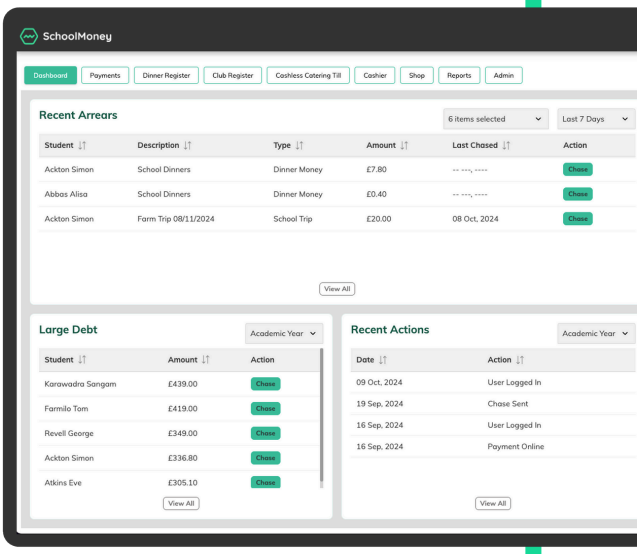
At VenturEd Solutions, we have two different cashless payment platforms designed for different types of schools. Our team are always happy to help you explore which one might be the perfect fit for your organisation's needs.

SchoolMoney

- Trusted by more than **2,300 schools**
- Over **1,900,000** parents using SchoolMoney
- More than **4 million** transactions per year

Collect payments all in one place, without the hassle. SchoolMoney is quick to learn, easy to use and integrates perfectly with your school communication tools.

venturedsolutions.co.uk/schoolmoney

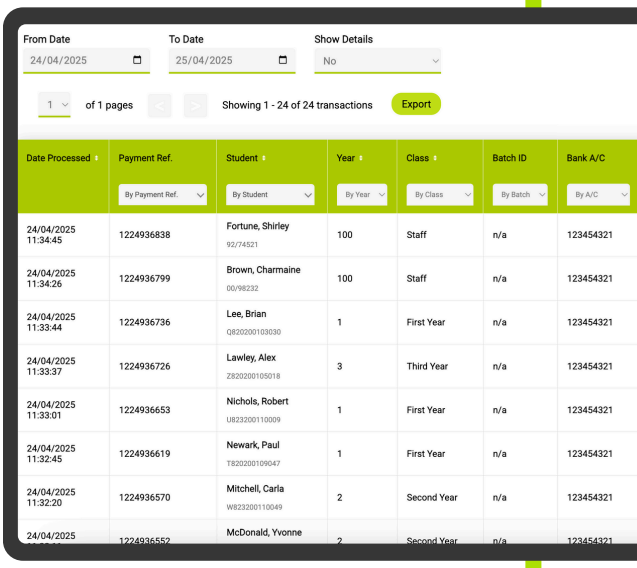


WisePay

- **Generate revenue** from school facilities
- Collect online payments **securely**
- Choose from a wide **range of modules**

The powerful, flexible school payments solution that's fully designed around you. Go fully cashless, streamline your operations and generate higher school income with WisePay.

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